

IN MEMORIAM.

BY S. SHER SINGH.

Professor Puran Singh has passed away, the poet-scientist of Upper India ! Even as Tagore warbles his notes in the woodlands of Bengal so did this Nightingale of Northern India pour out his heart in the sun-burnt plains of the Punjab. These two poets have a more or less family likeness ; they adore the past and hale the future, and are harbingers of a new Era which will see East and West in close union. Their poems have the same depth of feeling, the same flight of imagination, and reveal similar revolt against prescribed rules and rhythms. Even as Walt Whitman attempted fusion of prose and poetry in the West, so did these two artists blend the best in Indian poetry with the simplicity and inherent chastity of prose. Rabindra Nath and Puran Singh are thus two master-architects who have not only bridged the great gulf between the East and the West, but between discordant Muses : prose and poetry. There was, however, this difference. Rabindra Nath had a ready broadcasting medium in the "Modern Review" which spread his fame to all the corners of the earth in a little while, but Puran Singh was ill-equipped, and it required no less a person than Sir Jogindar Singh to organise the "Khalsa Review" to do for the Punjab what "Modern Review" has done for Bengal. But time and tide were not so favourable as anticipated, for Mother India is in the throes of new birth, and she can hardly think of anything constructive except what filters to it through the panes of politics. But whether Mother India realises it today or not, she will soon find that in Puran Singh, she has lost one of the brightest jewels from her necklace. In the meantime, Puran Singh's fame has already crossed the ocean, and when the soil is ripe, it is bound to strike a vigorous root in the Indian heart. Puran Singh's scientific work was no less creditable than his flights of poetic imagination. Even to

this day, students of forestry read with great respect the name and achievements of this Forest Chemist who occupied this chair at Dehradun at a time when no Indian could aspire to this coveted post. But whether as a scientist or as a poet, Puran Singh was first and foremost an idealist, and he realised suddenly with a flash of intuition what it took the plodding scientists years of laborious research to decipher. And even to the last day of his life, he was a practical-idealist sweating in the sunny plains of Lyallpur, carrying out his dreams which he conjured upon in his bedchamber at Dalanwala in Dehradun.

To the Sikh community, in particular, his loss must be deep and abiding. His premature death has created a vacuum which is not likely to be filled up very soon. Who has not heard of his thrilling speeches on the successive platforms of the Sikh Educational Conference where he held the audience spell-bound? Who has not read his poetic pen-pictures of the Gurus and Sikh saints in different organs of the Sikhs? Who has not read his rhapsodies and rapturous poems which give us an illuminating view of the true Sikh life? Puran Singh was every inch a true Sikh.

To the writer, the news of Puran Singh's death was severely shocking. It came like the bolt from the blue. At that time, I thought as if I had lost my real brother, but now I think that in him, I have lost my right-half. In the last ten years, I received hundreds of letters from him, but I met him but once, and it was a fairly long meeting. It was a case of love at first sight; we drank each others souls. There was nothing important, religious or affecting the community, which we did not discuss previous to publication. My last request to him was to write an introduction to my version of the Japji which is still on the anvil, and to which he agreed willingly, although Rabindra Nath Tagore had also written a Foreword for the same. But man proposes and God disposes! His last letter to me was very pathetic for while it was couched in the characteristic

Love-surcharged pathos of Puran Singh, it was not in his own hand ; it was written at his dictation by his son, for Puran Singh's hand stopped work before his heart. Ah ! dear brother, Punjab needs thee ever so much, but, perhaps, thou art required elsewhere for some higher duty ! It appears to me that Puran Singh knew of this approaching Event months before, for in one of his letters, he asked me to take charge of Guru's Garden," as he so beautifully put it. The mantle of Elijah did indeed descend upon Elisha, but this was because Elisha's shoulders were fit enough to carry that burden ! but how weak and broken is this need on which he tried to hang his garment ! The Guru alone knows how Puran Singh's gap is to be filled.

It was Tagore who wrote and Jadunath Sarkar published it broadcast that Sikhs are so decadent that they have not been able to produce a single poet after so many years ! This was many years ago. But today, I hope, Tagore will have no hesitation in altering his opinion after reading the wonderful spontaneous effusions of Puran Singh, and Bhai Vir Singh ji, the spiritual son and father. The Guru's Garden is still green, and will be greener every day. Sikhism, indeed, is the lotus-flower in this lake of India ; it will live as long as the lake is full of water. Puran Singh was a bright petal of this flower, and in time to come many a whorl of ruby-red petals are bound to be unfurled from this lotus of Sikhism.